

Prelude to Revolutions & the American Revolution

THE EUROPEAN MOMENT (1750 – 1900)



- New World colonies brought riches to European monarchs. This wealth led to larger armies to be used in wars of religion or battles to acquire more land.
- During the 1600s & 1700s it was an age of absolutism where kings and queens simply did as they pleased. For example, new taxes could be imposed without any consideration to the common man.



- Throughout the 1700s warfare between the European rivals continued.
 - War of Spanish Succession (1701 – 1714)
 - War of Austrian Succession (1740 – 1748)
 - French & Indian War (aka Seven Years War, 1756 - 1763)
- These new wars often involved many countries and were enormously expensive. (ex: By 1763, Britain's war debt was £137 million, yet their total budget a few years before was just £8 million).

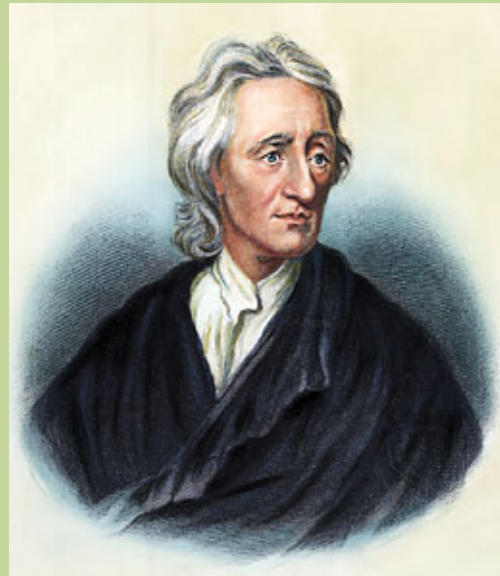


- However, simply imposing new taxes was not as easy as it was before. Similar to the Scientific Revolution people were also beginning to think differently about their political systems.
- The Enlightenment (mid to late 1700s) was a philosophical movement that fostered the belief that ordinary people could discover rational laws to govern social behavior.

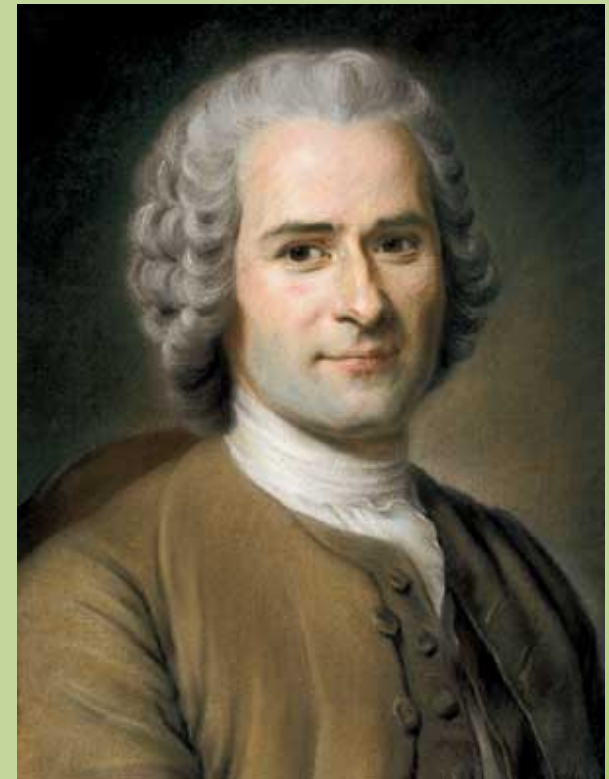


Enlightenment Thinkers

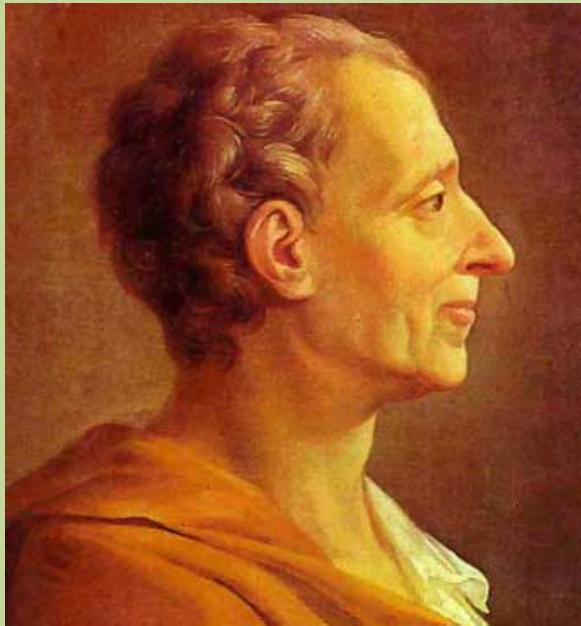
- John Locke (English) favored self-government; he thought that people had the ability to govern their own affairs. He stressed individual rights and that it was government's job to protect the life, liberty, and property of its people.



- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (French) thought that government should come from the consent of the people. In *The Social Contract* he argued that people were entering a “contract” with the government giving up some of their freedoms in favor of the common good.



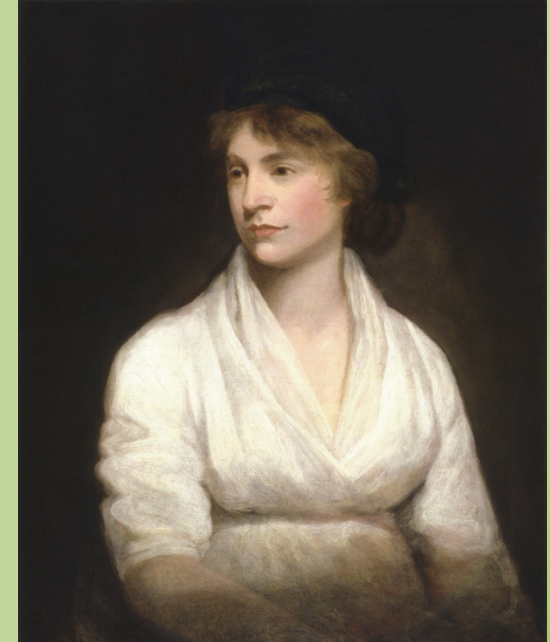
- Montesquieu (French) developed the notion of separation of powers, and that governments should have different branches (checks & balances).



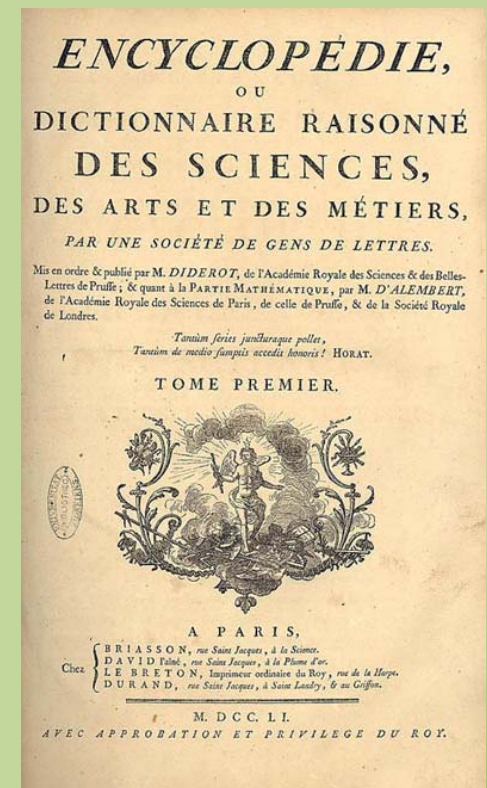
- Voltaire (French) strongly believed in tolerance, reason, and freedom of speech & religion. He used satire to get his point across.

- In the 1700s, Paris became the cultural and intellectual capital of Europe (people from all over the continent and the Americas came to gather, study, and philosophize).
- They held salons, social gatherings where intellectuals would discuss politics and ideas.
- Together the thinkers of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution challenged long-held beliefs about society and put forth new ideas:
 - the divine right of kings was questioned
 - the importance of the individual
 - human reason could solve problems, the Church was not always right

- European women played a significant role during the Enlightenment.
 - Educated & middle class women bought and discussed books of Enlightenment thinkers
 - They hosted salons thus bringing together intellectuals
 - Some were writers and commentators
 - Catherine the Great
- Mary Wollstonecraft (British) was an early advocate of women's rights. She argued that women were not naturally inferior to men, but only appeared so because of a lack of education.



- European kings and queens were often angered by these new ideas.
- A much smaller Counter Enlightenment took place (mainly in Catholic countries) emphasizing duty and obligation as opposed to individual rights.
- The Catholic Church banned the first issues of the *Encyclopedia* (volumes of works written by Enlightened thinkers) because they thought it fostered, “moral corruption, irreligion, and unbelief.”



- Some European rulers welcomed ideas from the Enlightenment, they became known as enlightened despots.



Frederick the Great (Prussia)

He granted many religious freedoms



Joseph II (Austria)

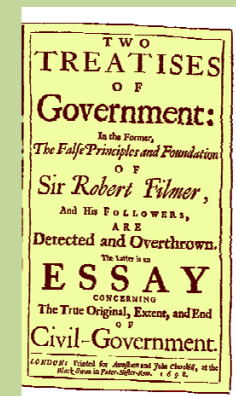
Freedom of the press, and legal reforms



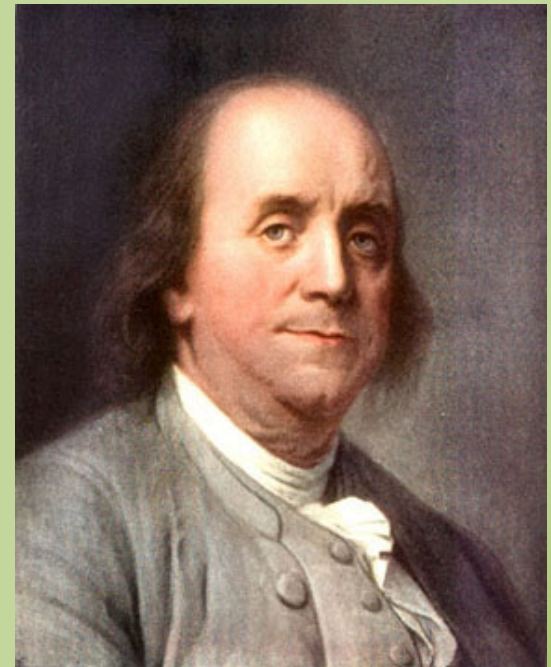
Catherine the Great (Russia)

Bought the Encyclopedia, pushed for legal reforms

- However, most monarchs were only willing to embrace reforms when it served their royal interests.
- “Radical” ideas that promoted republicanism or democracy were suppressed. Occasionally Enlightenment thinkers found refuge in foreign countries (often the rivals of their own country!)
- However, ideas continued to flow thanks to printing and Europe’s new growing middle class that could buy thinkers’ pamphlets.



- In general, most Europeans did not want radical change advocated by some Enlightenment thinkers. Many commoners saw the efforts of monarchs to centralize power as a violation of customs and the traditional bond between subject and king. (i.e. “Long live the King. Death to bad government.”).
- For example, Benjamin Franklin (although often seen as America’s renaissance man of the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution) was lukewarm to getting rid of the king.



The American Revolution

- For the most part, the British colonies in North America could do as they pleased prior to the French & Indian War. This was known as salutary neglect (i.e. keep doing what you want internally, just keep making the mother country rich).



- However, debt and fear of more costly conflicts led to a change in British policy.
 - Proclamation of 1763: established a western limit for settlement. The British government did not want Americans moving further west agitating Amerindians or the French.
 - New commercial regulations increased the cost of foreign goods and also made it more difficult for New England trade to be profitable.
 - The Stamp Act of 1765: a new tax that required people to pay to have all legal documents and many other printed material stamped.

- American colonists vigorously protested these changes.
 - Boycotts of British made goods (occasionally led by women)
 - Argued *no taxation without representation!*
 - The Sons of Liberty intimidated royal officials
- The British government dispatched soldiers (redcoats) to quell the unrest.





- The Boston Massacre (1770) (not really a massacre, 5 people died after an angry mob of colonists were fired upon) helped build support for revolution.
- The Boston Tea Party (1773) was an act of protest over the British government's decision to create a monopoly over tea in the colonies. Britain responded by passing the Coercive Acts (Intolerable Acts) making life more difficult for the colonists.

- In protest, colonial representatives met in Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress (1774) to discuss their options. By April the following year the first shots of the revolution took place in Massachusetts.
- At the Second Continental Congress (1775) George Washington was selected to lead the army.
- In general, public sentiment was mixed about a war. (1/3 favored, 1/3 opposed, 1/3 indifferent).



- In July of 1776, the Continental Congress wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence, symbolically breaking ties with mother England.





- During the war, some women served as nurses, spies, and even a few disguised themselves as men in order to fight.

- By 1778, British forces dwarfed the American troops (50,000 soldiers, 30,000 Hessians / German mercenaries, and nearly 175,000 sailors – compared to the Continental Army's 35,000 soldiers). Both sides had Native American allies.
- Although the British won most battles, American guerilla tactics wore down regimental British ranks. After the Battle of Saratoga, French troops came to the aid of the Americans.
- Following the Battle of Yorktown (1781), the British surrendered. Two years later the Treaty of Paris granted Americans independence. (Many loyalists fled to Canada).

- The first government of the U.S. was centered around the Articles of Confederation. However, it created too weak of a government and thus made it difficult for the country to govern (i.e. Congress had no right to tax).
- The Constitutional Convention met in 1787 to replace the Articles with the Constitution.
- The new Constitution created a stronger government with 3 branches of government, representation, federalism (power sharing with the states) and a Bill of Rights. Although slavery will remain.